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ABSTRACT

Several practical courses were designed in 1975 to train paraprofessional librarians to fill the need for trained staff in the library of the newly established Northland Pioneer College (NPC), a state-supported community college located in Navajo County, Arizona. Although the instructor originally traveled to each NPC center to conduct classes on a rotating basis, this approach had two major drawbacks: (1) the instructor had to travel long distances to meet with very few students; and (2) the students who were working in isolation remained isolated. These problems have been addressed by scheduling classes in a central location, and the program continues to be successful. The Library Media Technology curriculum allows students to earn a Certificate of Applied Science in Library Media Technology as well as a 2-year Associate of Applied Science degree in Library Media Technology. NPC also allows flexible course scheduling; for example, two or more related courses can be taken simultaneously for individual credit, and it is also possible for a student to take a class through an Independent Learning Contract. Although the NPC is linked through audio and video to each of its centers, many students--many of whom are Native Americans--still live hours away from the nearest center. Contacts are currently being made with other community colleges to see if they would host workshops/courses. The Advisory Committee is recommending the establishment of a Weekend Credential Program in which videotape presentations by experts in the field would be used to complement the on-site instructors. (MAB)

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THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM:

The Library Media Technology Program

at

Northland Pioneer College

ED335029

BY

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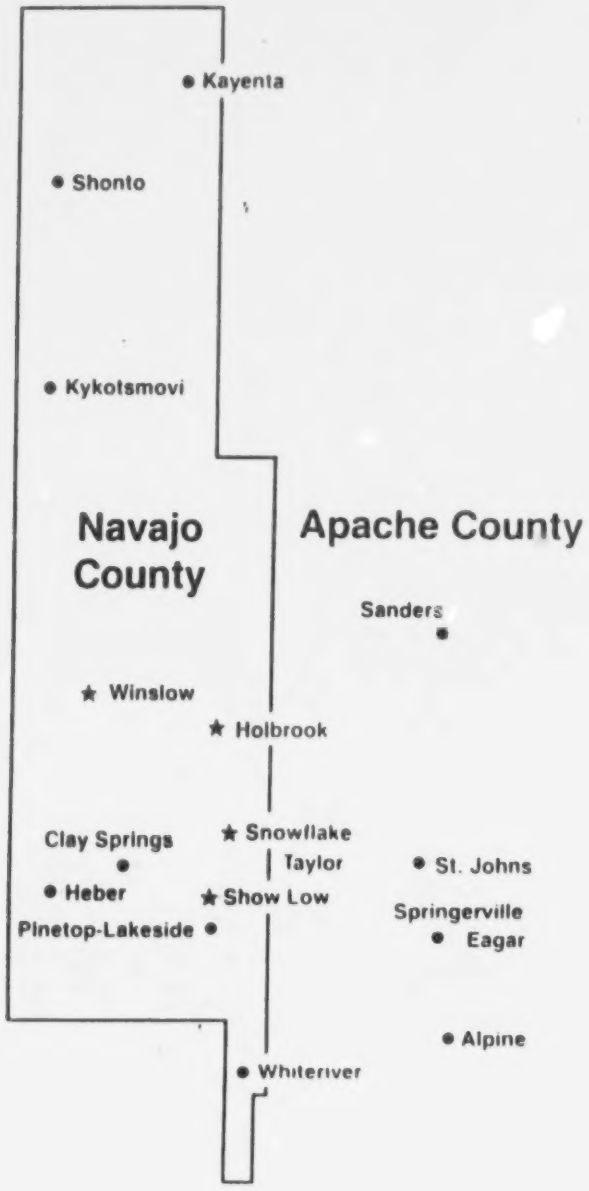
Introduction

It is rather hard for those of us living in the hinterlands to obtain research materials, especially within a few weeks. Therefore, I picked a topic for which I knew I could get quick access to materials. I also hoped that the "different" things we did at NPC would be of interest to others.

Writing this helped me to better understand the history of this program and where it is headed. I think this greater understanding will improve the effectivemness of my teaching.

Northland Pioneer College — Â decentralized community college

Serving approx. 21,000 square miles and a population of approx. 100,000



THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM:
the Library Media Technology Program
at Northland Pioneer College

Background

Northland Pioneer College is a state-supported community college located in Navajo County, Arizona; its first classes were held in 1974. Since Navajo County encompasses c. 21,000 square miles, Northland Pioneer operates a decentralized system of delivery for educational services with "instructional campuses", i.e. multiple buildings, in Holbrook, Show Low, Snowflake/Taylor, and Winslow. It also contracts with Apache County for services; and it has "satellite centers", i.e. single buildings, in Kykotsmovi, Whiteriver, Kayenta, Springerville/Eager, St. Johns, and Heber as well as various extension service units (See map.). (NPC Catalog)

How to provide library services for NPC students in such a situation became the problem of newly-hired librarian, Allen Rothlisberg, in 1975. While technology could be used to solve many of the logistical problems, Allen's bigger problem was the lack of trained staff. There was no money to hire other "professional librarians" (requires an M.L.S.) and no training for paraprofessionals outside of Phoenix and Tucson. Hence, Allen designed several practical courses in order to train the staff he hired. (Rothlisberg, 1988)

Gradually, others working in the small school and public libraries in the area began expressing interest in taking these classes, and a needs assessment was conducted in the spring of 1986. This study revealed "a critical need to train this limited number of paraprofessionals staffing the many school and public libraries in this area that are without the services of a professional librarian." ("Application for Approval..., 1986)

The Library Media Technology Program

The Library Media Technology curriculum was approved in 1986 and allowed for a Certificate of Applied Science in Library Media Technology at the completion of 21 specified hours as well as for a 2-year Associate of Applied Science degree in Library Media Technology.

Courses were offered for the first time in the fall of 1987 with a new approach: Since students were so scattered over c. 40,000 square miles, it was decided that the Instructor would travel to each NPC center on a rotating basis where there were students enrolled in a library class. Students received materials at the first class with a schedule of when and where the Instructor would be. Contact would then be maintained in person at the centers or by telephone (free at NPC centers) or by mail. (Rothlisberg, 1988)

There were two very big problems with this approach: 1) The Instructor traveled an average of 4 hours each week to meet with 1, 2, or NO students; and 2) the students who were already working in isolation remained isolated.

A different approach had to be worked out when I became an Instructor in 1988 since I could not travel because of my limited ability to drive. We then tried scheduling classes in Show Low - a relatively central place. Classes now meet there in 4-hour blocks on 3 Saturdays a semester with other work being done on an individual basis. This is at least as much face-to-face contact with the Instructor as before and has an extremely important advantage for the student - that of getting to know others doing similar work and sharing ideas and problems with those peers.

In 1989, a new twist was added when the number of students required to make a class was increased; since then, NPC has often offered 2 or more related courses in the same time slot. For example, next semester LIB 104 (Media Preparation and Application) and LIB 105 (Equipment Operation and Utilization) will be held simultaneously. As its Instructor, in our class meetings I will cover material common to or applicable to both courses while individual assignments will be specific to the course in which one is enrolled. (And, it is now possible to get credit for both.)

Another approach used in some classes is to divide students by class and work with each group separately. (This would be similar to teaching a combined 6-7-8th grade class such as we have in Alpine.) I do not like this approach because I want as much student interaction as possible in the time allowed.

In 1989-90, Sunday classes in Winslow were added to the schedule along with the Saturday classes in Show Low.

Does this seem confusing? Well, it has taken me 3 years to figure it out, but the students LOVE it; the people in classes really enjoy them and find them very worthwhile. (There have been 400 enrollments through spring of 1990; a typical class consists of people from St. Johns, Winslow, Holbrook, Globe, Miami, Hotevilla, Alpine, Lakeside, Snowflake, and New Mexico.) (Advisory Committee Minutes, 1990)

In addition to these "regular" classes, NPC also offers another alternative; it is possible for a student to take a class through an Independent Learning Contract. Courses that otherwise might not be offered because of low enrollment can be offered to from 1 to 5 students per semester via this alternative. (Instructor compensa-

tion is per student, by the way.) This also increases our flexibility in being able to meet student needs. For example, a year ago I developed a 1-unit course on Collection Evaluation. Some of my students this semester mentioned they had to evaluate the collections where they were working but they had not had the class. I was able to work with these students via a Learning Contract. They learned how to evaluate their collections and got credit for doing it.

Future Directions

Even though NPC has audio and video links to each of its centers, these do not satisfy our needs at this moment because many students, many of whom are Native Americans, still live hours away from the nearest center. Also, video would not allow for the face-to-face student interaction we want.

We do have permission to offer the Library Media Technology program everywhere in the state except for Maricopa County. (Mesa Community College has the only other similar program in Arizona; PCC's was discontinued many years ago.) Contacts are currently being made with other community colleges to see if they might host courses/workshops. (Advisory Committee Minutes, 1990)

In addition, the program's Advisory Committee (Minutes, 1990) is recommending the establishment of a Weekend Credential Program which might be attratcive to those outside of Navajo and Apache counties. (This would function similar to the way PRD 161 is done except that the students would stay at the NPC dormitory now under construction.) Videotaped presentations by experts in the field would be used to complement the on-site instructors.

Conclusion

NPC and its Library Media Technology program are valiantly facing the challenge of providing quality education to an incredibly scattered population. The approaches are flexible and innovative; the content is practical. The results of this educational program are already visible:

1. Students are getting raises because of their increased level of competence.
2. The level of library service in the area has increased as evidenced by the fact that libraries are now applying for grants and offer special services like talking books, summer reading programs, storyhours, and puppetry.
3. Inter-library cooperation is growing. There is now a Navajo County Library Consortium and interlibrary loans have dramatically increased.

A lot of people are working hard to achieve this, and we all hope the program continues to grow.

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